10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
FL11 Luo FL11

765 she makes a new girdle from papyrus while still at the river, and wears it as she returns to her village. She is then free to remarry.

775 Dead people are sometimes said to come to life again. This is reported to take place within a short time after death. It is said that the spirit had gone on a journey and had returned after the man was thought to be dead, but in time to stop the funeral. The supposed dead person sneezes and revives, the sneezing being thought to be the signal that the spirit has returned from his journey.

764 **Death of a wife.** Should a wife die before her husband, her body is buried in the house, and, when the husband dies, he is buried in the goat-house near. He may not be buried in the same house with his wife. The animal offered at a man's funeral is always an ox, while it is an old cow that is offered at a woman's funeral. The skin from the animal is used to wrap the body as a shroud. The meat from the animal is divided in the following manner: a shoulder is retained for the dead and is eaten by the mourners at the grave, the second shoulder is for the relatives in the village, and the remainder, with the exception of the neck, is for the guests who live at a distance: the neck is given to the medicine-man.

766 762 A suicide is buried in the open, never in a house. Should the death have taken place in a house, it is burned down, for no one will live in it.

Warfare.

721 **Mode of conducting wars.** The people are not fond of war and fortunately their wars are never very serious matters. Cattle-lifting and women-stealing are the chief causes of fighting. The battles take place after short notice, when it is found that cattle have been robbed or when the alarm is given that a woman has been captured by some other clan. When a fight is impending, the attacking party drive a few cows to some spot where the other party may see them and challenge the others to come and take them. The party challenged must either attempt to carry off the cows while the others protect them, or they must pay a fine imposed by the attacking army.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

Homicide and Suicide among the Joluo of Kenya

SUICIDE AMONG JOLUO

We have discussed the Luo attitude toward death at some length in our description of homicide. These attitudes apply equally to suicide, except that they are extended to an association of the idea of death and its concomitant link with the supernatural to self-destruction, as an assurance or determination on the part of the individual to hasten the day when supernatural forces can be made to bear on the frustrations which led up to the act of suicide. The motives for suicide are thought to be to avenge the deed by the malevolent supernatural forces which at death become allied to the dead, who are able to use them against those on earth to solve problems which they found beyond human solution.

Throughout childhood there is constant reference to suicide, and in adolescence, early marriage, and old age the threat of suicide is an effective technique used by the Joluo to achieve goals or to avoid distasteful consequences. Threats are not often put into practice because they are used only when their effectiveness is relatively assured.

Unfortunately for the student, suicides are not usually reported to the authorities, although legally they should be. Therefore, few cases are recorded as in advanced countries in the coroner's court. The Joluo believe that suicide brings *chira* to a large segment of the clan of the suicide, and it is therefore kept as quiet as possible and dealt with immediately by the clan elders and clan medicine men, *jobilo*. The family of the suicide are forced to perform cleansing rituals and ceremonies before they may again participate in the social life of the clan. Data are for these reasons hard to collect. The few cases which were brought to the attention of the authorities were only those suspected of having been cases of murder which were made to look like suicide.

During a two-year tour among the Joluo tribes of Central Nyanza, I was able to collect 220 cases from informants. Of

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

this number, 90 were male suicides and 130 female. I have selected for the purpose of this chapter 10 male cases and 13 female cases as typical, and these were investigated in more detail to provide examples. Considerable time was spent among the villagers in each case, and full discussions were held with the elders in an attempt to determine the motive and the events which led up to the suicide. For obvious reasons, I shall not use correct names when describing these cases.

MALE SUICIDES.

Male suicides in Luo usually follow loss of status. Seven of the ten cases can be so classified. The first five are of the type which involved intense emotional feelings of shame, loss of honor and status within the framework of the indigenous culture. Following these are two case histories of suicides which involved loss of status in the acquired or modern sense. Two cases will be described which involved the loss of status through poverty and the loss of traditional respect of sons, and finally one case which resulted from social ostracism.

The first suicide concerned a man whose younger brother married before he did. In Joluo society, men of the extended family marry in strict order of status, that is, the senior son of the senior wife must marry first. It may happen that he is younger in chronological age than, perhaps, a son of a more junior wife, but even in this circumstance, the younger son in years, who is senior in status, is technically married before his brother—that is, the payment of the first animals for a young girl allow the senior son to marry.

Suicide Case No. 1.

A young man who was the senior son of a senior wife was chronologically the oldest of all the sons in the village. His father and mother were both dead and, although he would eventually become head of the homestead, until he married he was regarded as a juvenile.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

was regarded as a juvenile. The homestead was supervised by the levir of his father's second wife. The young man desperately wanted to marry. His stepmother, however, had spread the rumor that he had had syphilis. Therefore none of the eligible girls would have him. He went to a medical dispensary off and on for several months but treatment was not successful.

While he was away, a half brother, the son of the senior living wife of the village, married without his knowledge. The young man obviously had been under intense emotional strain caused by the rumors and gossip associated with the fact that he had a venereal disease. He was the senior son by Luo customary law and on marriage would be the head of the village. His half brother had taken a wife. This added to the humiliation and shame and would bring ridicule upon him whenever he met with his contemporaries for the rest of his life. This was too much. He went to the *thim*, the no man's land surrounding his clan grazing area and the place where the ancestors are normally placated, and there hanged himself from a tree.

His brothers and relatives were concerned about his absence and suspected what he had done. He was found by one of them after many days and his family and minimal lineage group completely destroyed the tree, including the roots, and there on the spot buried him and performed his funeral rites. The family was cleansed by the *jabilo* and the ancestors placated to receive his spirit by the sacrifice of a white cockerel and a black sheep.

The first son to be born to his brother's marriage was named after him to placate his spirit and to continue his name in the lineage genealogies.

Naming a child for a relative who had died is used by the Joluo in many ways, but only after consultation with the *jabilo*. It is obvious therefore that any misfortune which occurred to the family or to the lineage segment after this suicide was attributed to it. The fact that the first child born after the suicide

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 553 was given his name reveals their attempt to avoid the consequences of his act.

762 159 684 [178] The second case arises from a breach of customary law which in the old days would have meant banishment but which today brings social ostracism.

Suicide Case No. 2.

The suicide was caught in the act of intercourse with his full brother's wife. The Luo believe that such an act involving members of the same *Jokamio* (that is, those descended from the same mother or grandmother) brings *chira* to the whole clan. The security and solidarity of family relationships are [578] threatened by the act because it involves quarrels which may lead to violence within the primary segment of the clan. In this case the brother did not tell the elders of the clan but merely threatened to do so. The guilty man returned to his own homestead and hanged himself in his hut. The house was destroyed [783] and members of the extended family were cleansed by the *jabilo*. The cleansing ceremony took the same form as in the first case, with the addition that the village was sprinkled with medicine in order that it might continue to be used by the dead man's family.

In the next case there are two clear motives which led to the suicide. The first, perhaps the most important, lies in indigenous beliefs and attitudes, while the second lies in more modern attitudes.

Suicide Case No. 3.

159 762 556 [661] This Luo was about 30 years old and had been employed as a driver for the Government for many years. Drivers in Kenya receive a relatively high salary, and in addition some take advantage of their position and make extra money by illegally charging people for transportation. Through these activities, he became a relatively rich man and was able to marry a total of five wives at his comparatively young age. He was also wealthy

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

in cattle, and had a permanent modern house at his homestead where four of his wives cultivated large gardens. His fifth wife lived with him at his place of employment. At the time of his suicide he was in the process of marrying a sixth wife when, during one of the marriage ceremonies at her village, a brother of the bride objected to her becoming his wife. He charged that the man had already too many wives and could not look after them. As proof, he offered the evidence that his most recent wife, the fifth one, was no more than a prostitute and that he, himself, had used her on several occasions. This caused a fight in the village and quarrels which led to the exchange of many curses between the two groups, and therefore the wedding could never take place. The driver returned to his homestead to confront the wife named in the incident with the accusation and, in typical Luo fashion, she calmly admitted her guilt, chiding him to do something about it. He beat her severely and she ran from her house and spent the night in the bush. He brooded all night on what had happened and on the shame his wife had brought him. Moreover, he knew that he was shortly to be accused of fraudulent conversion of funds by the Government and would lose his job, if he did not end up in prison: neither of which were considered really serious. However, in his emotional state, these must be considered as contributory causes. He could see his whole world collapsing around him.

The next morning he sent his servant, a young lad, to the butcher's shop for meat in order to get him out of the way. He then hanged himself from the ceiling of his hut.

My Luo informants state with confidence that the prime cause of this suicide was the behavior of his wife, which had brought shame to a proud and successful man, so that he could no longer face his friends. The fact that the Government was interested in recovering a large sum of money which he was alleged to have used for his own purposes is, in my opinion however, a contributory factor.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

Suicide Case No. 4.

762 159 584 A young lad aged about 23 years was being married to a girl from a neighboring location. He had paid a portion of bride-wealth and many of the early ceremonies had been performed. His bride had returned to her home as is the custom until he had paid the remainder of the bride-wealth. He went to his father-in-law to discuss the last and final payment, with his *jagam* as witness, and the father-in-law agreed that a milch cow would complete the payment. He returned in high spirits to the home of his father and asked for the cow, stating that this was all the father-in-law demanded. His father told him that if he had not paid enough, then the father-in-law must be a bad man and the girl was not worth having. The father and the son quarreled, and during the quarrel the son threatened suicide if he did not get the animal. The next day the son took a cow by force, while his father was absent, and sent it off to his father-in-law by a group of herd boys. When the father returned, he was furious at what his son had done and went after the cow himself. He caught up with the boys and brought the cow back to the village.

159 762 The son had warned his father that, if he should take this course, he would hang himself, and, as he saw the father returning in the distance, he hanged himself from a tree which stood just outside his father's village. This tree, as is the custom, was completely uprooted and destroyed.

762 159 684 The next cases are two which were due to modern circumstances but which in a sense involve the loss of status and therefore brought shame to the individual.

Suicide Case No. 5.

A young man eloped with the wife of a Kikuyu in Nairobi, far from his homeland. Whereas in Luo customary law to run off with the wife of another man is not considered to be particularly serious, in Kikuyu customary law it is regarded as

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 ●
159
684

a criminal offense. He was caught, and the Court fined him a relatively large sum of money and gave him thirty days in which to pay. He became very depressed and, after unsuccessful attempts to raise the money, he hanged himself.

Suicide Case No. 6.

159
762
685

The man involved was in his early thirties, and was in a position of trust with a Local Government body in Nyanza Province. He was alleged to have abused his position of trust by embezzling a considerable sum of money. The auditors had come across this defalcation in the books and brought it to his attention, but before he was arrested he killed himself by falling on a knife. Both the cause and the method can be said to be modern.

159
762

Case numbers seven and eight involve a loss of status, but on the other hand are attributable to poverty.

Suicide Case No. 7.

[888]
[626]

An old man whose wives had all died had to depend on his sons for support. The sons supported the old man while in his village but, after a quarrel, built a new village of their own and refused to build a house for him. As he had no one to support him and as he felt that he was ostracized by his sons, he had, to quote the Luo elders, "No other recourse than to commit suicide. His sons killed him and will suffer." He hanged himself on a thick tree which grew by a river, where he was found by an ex-chief. The Luo elders were quick to point out that he achieved his revenge, because the descendants of his sons were already few in number and mostly girls. "The line will die out because they killed him."

Suicide Case No. 8.

The man in this case was a widower living with his only son, who gave him food, but could not afford to maintain the ap-

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

159 762 propriate prestige of beer parties and entertainment of his father's friends. On the day of the suicide, a group of the father's friends arrived at the village and the father asked his son's wife to prepare food and drink for them. This she refused to do, so that night he burned himself in his house, which the Luo believe brought ruin to the lineage and particularly to his son.

762 159 556 754 The next case is an interesting one because it illustrates an inherent Luo trait: the profound jealousy of anyone who is successful.

152 ## Suicide Case No. 9.

[587] The man who died was the brother of the suicide in case number 2, and took the latter's wives as leviratic wives. He also inherited his gardens. Shortly after this, he began to prosper phenomenally. The elders state that his cattle produced mostly heifers and some produced twin heifers. His crops were better than his neighbors, so they began soon to suspect him of witchcraft. In the space of a few years as his prosperity increased, he was more and more ostracized from the activities of the community. The final blow came when his own *libamba*, minimal lineage group, denied him entrance to a lineage sacrifice on the grounds that he was a witch. Ten years after his brother's suicide, almost to a day, he hanged himself.

When the elders were questioned as to whether or not this man was a witch, they replied that he could not possibly have been a witch, because he had committed suicide. If he were a witch, his medicine would have been so powerful that the effect of being ostracized by the community would not have bothered him at all, let alone driven him to suicide.

762 159 828 The Luo believe that those most likely to commit suicide are those who have descended from a lineage in which there has been a history of suicide. Case number 2 was the brother of case number 9, and case number 5 the son of case number

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

159
762
828

9. This example is used time and time again by the Luo to prove the point that the tendency to commit suicide is inherited or caused by ancestors.

I was able to follow one particular series of events in connection with Luo marriage laws and customs over three years, which began with the elopement of a girl and her lover, and ended in suicide only a month before this chapter was written.

584
159
762

Marriage in Luo is traditionally arranged by the family of the boy and the family of the girl. Not infrequently, because of debt or close friendship, a father may promise his daughter in marriage to a friend or creditor while the girl is still very young. He obtains the animals to which he is entitled (*dho i keny'*) approximately one half of the final bride-wealth, at that time and the girl is known as *nyar kiseke,* "the wife of the beer reed," as this arrangement is usually contracted and finalized at a beer party. So it was in the case we are about to describe.

Suicide Case No. 10.

The girl in this case had been promised by her father when she was but three years of age to a friend of his own age group. The father, Opio[2], was a well educated Jaluo, and by the time his daughter, Akech, was ready to be taken in marriage, at the age of 18, he was employed as the headmaster of an intermediate school administered by a local mission. He had insisted that his daughter be educated to enhance the final payment (*dho miluhini*) of her bride-wealth. She was, for an African woman, a well educated girl. She had received a secondary school education where, in this particular segment of the Joluo tribe, fewer than 1 per cent of the girls have had as much education.

[871]

Akech had been prepared for this event all her life. She knew her future husband and from a child, each time he visited

[2] All names are fictitious, but common Joluo names.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 159 584 the village, she would be teased and chided pleasantly about the fact that he was her future husband. Perhaps she would have been married sooner, had her future husband, Opala, not been employed in a city many hundreds of miles away. He returned on his long leave to consummate the marriage at the time when the girl had just finished her secondary education and was about 18 years of age.

While at school, however, Akech had fallen in love with a teacher, Okare, in a neighboring technical school and he was determined to marry her. He went to her father and pleaded to be allowed to repay the bride-wealth animals her father had received years before and to complete the bride-wealth payments to marry the girl by Luo law and custom. Opio adamantly refused, and her brothers threatened Okare with physical violence if he should try to see the girl again. Okare was heartbroken and returned to his place of employment. Akech, however, had other ideas. When she was told that the date of her wedding had been fixed, she pleaded and tried every traditional way of breaking the marriage, but was unsuccessful. Her father and her prospective husband remained adamant.[3]

159 762 584 684 The night before the wedding, she ran away from home to join Okare at his place of employment. Both knew that they would be pursued by the girl's brothers and by her father, so they hired a car and fled to the boy's village in a distant Luo tribe, some 200 miles away. Her father, brothers and future husband pursued the lovers to Okare's village where the father had him arrested for taking Akech from his custody. Okare's brothers, however, took the girl to Nairobi to hide her pending the result of the case. One of the brothers was then arrested for aiding and abetting the elopement.

Now the essence of this case goes to show that the father

[842] [3] By tradition, a girl may run off to the home of a "bride," thus to marry will produce sterility. She may climb a tree *bondo*, an *euphorbia*, which is believed to be closely associated with the ancestors. There are several other ways, all of which would cancel an ordinary wedding, but none is effective in the case of *nyar kiseke*.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

wanted the best of two worlds. Traditionally, elopement (*por*) is justified and is legal, albeit more difficult in cases of *nyar kiseke*, providing that the young man has stated his willingness to pay bride-wealth and has been refused. Moreover, it is the last remaining traditional way by which a young woman, forced to marry against her will, is able to break the arrangement. Today, however, because there are so many illegal unions, the African courts take a serious view of young men and women running off to the towns without the slightest intention of paying bride-wealth.

While Okare and his brother were retained in gaol, pending the case, the girl's father and her brothers went to Nairobi, where they found the girl after some difficulty and took her back to her village by force. There they married her to Opala and he, with two of her brothers, took her by force to the place of his employment which was in another territory nearly 700 miles away.

Opio, who was an influential man in his district, then proceeded with the case against Okare and his brother. The Court decided in favor of Opio, ordered compensation for the expenses he had incurred securing the return of his daughter. Okare and his brother were heavily fined for having taken the girl from the protection of her father. The compensation and the fine amounted to a very large sum of money and the boy appealed to the District Officer's Court. Pending the Appeal, he went to search for new employment at Nairobi. Akech, in the meantime, had arrived at the home of her husband in the far away city, only to find that he was already married and that his first wife, as a Christian, refused to have her in her home. Quarrels and arguments began in earnest, with the result that Opala had no alternative but to send the girl back to her father and to demand a divorce. Akech, however, did not go home but returned to Nairobi to Okare.

The father heard what had happened and, in the shame and humiliation, hanged himself in a classroom at the school

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

159 where he was headmaster. His final act was to write to all those involved in this series of incidents, which had taken nearly 762 three years, to the effect that his daughter had killed him, that shame was brought to his clan and lineage, and that the liaison she had formed with Okare would end in disaster. He swore he would return in spirit to ensure that the marriage would end in failure.

159 762 558 797 It can be seen from this case that the difficult transition faced by even the most educated Christian Jaluo is complicated by the intense residual customary law and the attitudes of the people regarding the authority of a father and the duty of his daughter to this authority. The father in his case was a well educated, highly respected, important person in his district. The daughter, by her behavior, had humiliated him and he took recourse in indigenous rules and beliefs to solve his problems. They were initially successful. In the end, however, the threat to his status as a Christian of the fact that he had married his daughter by force to a Christian who was already married and therefore a bigamist in the eyes of the Church, brought shame and disaster to his social position as a Christian headmaster. His final act, however, was typically an indigenous one. He would not face the shame and humiliation brought to him by the course of events, so he took refuge in traditional recourse to suicide as a curse to the future happiness of those whom he thought had caused his grievance. To the end, therefore, he struggled to obtain the best of two worlds.

FEMALE SUICIDES

762 The most common cause of suicide among females is domestic quarrels and, coupled with that, the fear of physical violence from their husbands. Secondly, jealousy between co-wives; thirdly, the result of extreme grief, and finally, illness.

In the first category, out of the thirteen cases recorded from our sample, seven were of the domestic quarrel type. Of these, one was complicated by a curse from the husband, another

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

from the fear of consequences arising from the behavior of her son and, in two cases, there was a suspicion that the women did not in fact commit suicide, but were murdered by their husbands in such a way that it looked as if they had committed suicide. 762 ●

Suicide Case No. 11.

A young woman was accused by her husband at a beer party of having slipped quietly out for intercourse with a man from the village. To prove that she was innocent, she hanged herself on a tree which was near the homestead. If she had been guilty, the Joluo argue, "she could have been cleansed, but she could not be cleansed for having done nothing." 762 159 684 783

Suicide Case No. 12.

A young wife, newly married, had offended her husband in some way and he refused to eat her food. (This is a customary curse and is a very severe punishment to a wife.) She threatened to kill herself if he did not eat it. He then took the food to the senior wife, who ate it, adding insult to the injury already done. The young wife went to her hut where she stood on her grinding stone and hanged herself from the roof. 762 159 578

The elders were quick to point out in this instance that since her death the village had been abandoned and many children of the lineage had died. All this, they believe, was caused by the ghost of the abused wife. 762 159

The third case involved a young girl who committed suicide because she did not wish to marry the person chosen for her by her parents. 762 159 584

Suicide Case No. 13.

A very young girl, little more than a child, objected in the traditional way to the union which her parents had arranged.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 159 584 The parents insisted that she be sent or "dragged" to her husband. On the night of the ceremonial defloration she committed suicide by hanging. This act is said to have brought a curse, not only to the prospective groom's homestead, but also on her own minimal lineage. Her mother was so struck by grief that she committed suicide later. The mother's case will be discussed below as case number 21.

The next two cases are those where foul play was suspected.

Suicide Case No. 14.

762 159 578 A woman was found hanging by a rope at night by her husband. He dug her grave and had buried her in the morning. In evidence given at the preliminary inquiry witnesses testified to the fact that she and her husband quarrelled some hours before her death, as the result of a beer party, and that she had left early for her own village. The body showed signs of having been beaten, but her husband argued that he had beaten her after she had hanged herself, as is the custom of the Joluo.

The case was not tried for lack of evidence, and the husband's family believed that she did in fact commit suicide, whereas her family believed that she was murdered.

[583] It is significant to note that the husband did not claim the return of bride-wealth, as he would likely have done had it been a clear case of suicide. Neither did her family offer to repay the bride-wealth, or to give another girl in lieu of bride-wealth, as they might have done had the husband been clear of blame.

Suicide Case No. 15.

762 159 595 A woman had quarrelled with her husband because she alleged that he would not give her her proper share of sexual pleasure. The argument involved other wives and they told this woman that her husband hated her and that she would be better dead. The next morning she was found on her bed, having been killed by a knife or having inflicted a fatal wound on herself with a knife.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

Homicide and Suicide among the Joluo of Kenya

As in the previous case, the woman's family believed that she was murdered and the man's family believed that she committed suicide. It is difficult to say which version is true. It is extremely unusual, however, for a woman to kill herself with a knife, and I have not recorded another case. There was one case among the men, Number 6, but this was a modern "intellectual," who lived in a Council house with a plastered ceiling, which was hardly suitable for hanging in the traditional way.

The next case is the one mentioned earlier involving a woman's fear of the consequences of her son's behavior.

Suicide Case No. 16.

The woman in this case was the wife of a squatter who was a servant to an important Chief. The Chief helped him to get married to this woman, a local girl who was in fact related in some way to the Chief. After his establishment as an affine of the Chief, the *jodak* became very wealthy and built his own village on a place allocated by the Chief. He married a second wife after the building of his village and, just before the case we are discussing, married a third wife. The first wife had many children, most of whom were daughters. At the time of her suicide, all but one had married and her house was very wealthy. The houses of the other two wives were therefore extremely jealous.

One day during the short rainy season, the owner of the village, the husband, wished to make a present of *sim-sim* to his Chief and benefactor in order that he might pay the tax which at that time was calculated on the number of wives and also to pay the traditional tribute to the Chief. The woman's son at about that time invited a large number of guests to his village and demanded that his mother give him *sim-sim* with which to entertain them. She refused because she knew her husband intended to use the entire crop. The son disobeyed

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 his mother and took the *sim-sim* by stealth. When the hus-
159 band came to collect it for the Chief, he found that a large por-
[595] tion of it had disappeared. This caused a bitter quarrel be-
tween him and the boy's mother.

In fear of the consequences of what her son had done, the woman placed a rope, which was used for tying up one of her cows for milking, in a small basket and went out of the village as if to collect vegetables. She went to one of the largest trees in a nearby valley which was hidden from sight by thick bush and there hanged herself. My informant then described the scene as follows: "The first person who found the body caned it very hard and, after having cut the rope, started mourning. The place was soon filled with people and some were asked
[783] to bring hoes, axes, and *pangas* to destroy the tree. There and then people of the village and her lineage started their work and within a day the tree was completely destroyed and all the roots dug up from the ground and burned."

"When I asked why the tree was being destroyed," the informant went on, "the elders told me that it was being done to stop more people from hanging from it, for we Luo believe that hanging is inherited by different people in different clans. If
[824] a clan had not had a person hang himself before, it is difficult for one in that clan to hang himself or herself. If a tree on which someone had hanged himself was allowed to remain, it would drag other people to it for the same purpose."

The next case involves a curse as well as domestic trouble.

Suicide Case No. 17.

159 The husband of this suicide had been having considerable
762 trouble with his cattle and many were dying from disease. The
578 beginning of the illness coincided with the elopement of her daughter with a young man who had neither paid bride-wealth nor seemed likely to pay it. Her husband blamed his misfortunes on this incident and his suspicions were confirmed by

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

the local prophet (*jabilo*). When he returned to the village from his visit to the *jabilo*, he cursed his wife as follows: "I wish the disease which killed my heifers would kill you, my wife, for your daughter is a whore who has brought the disease of her womb to my cattle." From the evidence, the woman seemed to have planned her death carefully. She made her daughters swear that they would not be married to anyone who would ever give her husband cattle. She distributed all of her belongings to them and placed a curse on the village to the effect that her husband should never be able to marry another wife. She then entered her house and hanged herself.

Since that time, the Luo pointed out, his daughters have all eloped with persons who have not paid bride-wealth and no other woman has ever consented to marry him or to live with him.

The next case is typical of many which involve jealousy at the taking of a second wife, especially without the first wife's permission, or as in this case, expressly against her wishes. My informant was living near the village when the suicide took place and his mother became involved in it. The story was told to me in his mother's presence and she helped with the details.

Suicide Case No. 18.

A man, Okech, who was happily married, invited his wife's sister, Apolo, to come to live at his homestead to act as a nurse-maid for their first child.[6]

[6] This is common practice among the Joluo and often the "nurse" (*japidi*) is later married by her brother-in-law, especially if the sisters co-operate and agree to be happy together. Frequently the *japidi* will form a strong attachment to her brother-in-law, and marriage becomes desirable or even necessary. If a man marries a *japidi*, she becomes known as *nyar ekendo*, the wife of the same blood, and the children of both wives share the same hut and trace descent through the elder sister. The term *ekendo* is also used to describe a girl given to replace a sister who was unable to bear her husband a son; it therefore does have a slight connotation of stigma.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

African Homicide and Suicide

Okech decided to marry the nursemaid but his wife adamantly refused to agree. Okech beat her severely and she ran home to her parents where she remained for several weeks. Her sister, Apolo, continued to live in the village and by now cohabited openly with the husband as if they were man and wife. The wife eventually returned and made an effort to accept the situation as it existed. The husband built Apolo her own house as the second wife (*nyachira*) in the customary place in the homestead, but had not paid bride-wealth. In fact, he had not completed (*riso*) bride-wealth of the first wife, which added tension to the situation.

All appeared to go well until one night Okech returned from a beer party and abused his wife. What was more serious, he went to the hut of Apolo to sleep although it was the customary period of the month when he should have gone to the house of his first wife.

Early the next morning, the wife visited the mother of my informant and insisted that she accept as a gift her cooking pot and other household utensils. Her excuse was that she had bought new ones. She returned to her house where she packed the utensils and sent Apolo to carry them to my friend's mother. Meanwhile, Okech was sleeping.

She then hanged herself from a rafter in her hut. The noise of her strangulation awakened Okech, who cut the rope and made frantic efforts to revive her with water and to cane the body in the customary Luo manner. His wailing brought his brothers and relatives from their homesteads nearby.

When Apolo returned she was confronted by the irate brothers of Okech who accused her of being a witch who had brought *chira* to the village and to the lineage. They beat both Okech and Apolo and drove them from the homestead. The hut in which the woman had hanged herself was then immediately destroyed.

Apolo was not allowed to enter the homestead of her father who, with his sons, drove her from the clan area by thrashing

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

her with canes. She never returned to the district. In time Okech was forgiven and returned to his homestead. He never remarried, but now lives with two leviratic wives.

Suicide Case No. 19.

This suicide was the junior wife of a very wealthy man. Although he was wealthy, he did not provide the modern luxuries for his wives which are now becoming customary and which carry high status among women. This woman decided that she would take matters into her own hands and killed a goat belonging to herself in order to sell the meat at the market to get money and millet, so that she could get the things that she desired. When her co-wives saw what she had done, they took part of the millet and some of the money. The woman appealed to her husband, but he sided with his other wives. That evening she went into the bush near the village and hanged herself.

Suicide Case No. 20.

This woman was the second wife (*nyachira*) of a wealthy man who preferred his first and third wives to her. This preferential treatment gave them courage to abuse her often and to show her that they were the only wives of the husband. On one occasion, when she was quarrelling with the husband, the other two wives joined in and beat her and abused her. The husband looked on in amusement. Shortly after, he took hold of her son and began to cane him, saying that he was as bad as his mother. His mother tried to interfere, but was prevented from doing so by her co-wives, who continued to beat her. As soon as it got dark that night, she disappeared. Her son had run away to her mother's home. The people from the village and her relatives searched for her for three days, and at the end of the third day, her people began to mourn as if she were dead. The head of a goat was buried in front of her house to represent her body, for they were certain that she was dead and her body devoured by wild animals.

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

762 The elders claim that her life was a tragic one, and that her 159 sister had hanged herself a few years before and had returned for her.

The next case is the one mentioned earlier in connection with case number 13 involving the mother of a girl who had committed suicide after her mother had forced her to marry against her wishes.

Suicide Case No. 21.

This mother realized that her daughter's death was due to her action. She therefore tried to commit suicide by hanging shortly after she heard the news, but was prevented from doing so by her husband and his children. A week later, she tried to hang herself on a tree by the river but she had been followed by her co-wives, who cut her down in time. Finally, a month later she hanged herself from the roof of her hut and, although she was cut down while still alive by her watchful co-wives, she died shortly afterwards from a broken neck.

Profound grief lay behind the next case. It was related to me by an informant who was present at the time.

Suicide Case No. 22.

A man in the prime of life died suddenly. His death came as a shock to all his friends and relatives, among whom he was regarded very highly. This man had two wives and a mistress (*nyas gogo*). The latter was away at the time of his death visiting her family, and she had been cursed there by her father because she refused to return to the family into which she had been legally married. Her father refused to return the bride-wealth, or to accept bride-wealth from her lover, with whom she was living. When she returned to the village of her lover, she heard the wailing of the women and knew that her lover [764] was dead. On such occasions it is customary to run into the

19:Wilson E-5 (ca. 1950) 1960
FL11 Luo FL11

village straight to the hut which houses the body and to fall prostrate on it, wailing and crying. However, on this occasion, the woman walked very slowly into the village as if in a daze and without crying and without wailing and without saying a word to anyone. She entered her house and locked the door. Those in the village immediately became suspicious and broke the door down but within those five minutes she was found dead from hanging. The villagers told me that she believed the curse of her father had killed the man she loved, so she went to join him.

159 762 [164]

Suicide Case No. 23.

An elderly woman, whose husband had died, depended on her children for sustenance. In her old age she contracted a disease similar to leprosy. Her son, as is customary on such occasions, destroyed her house in the compound and built one for her outside of the homestead. One morning they found that she had hanged herself because, they stated, of the pain and trouble she experienced through her illness and because she was so unhappy that she could not take her grandchildren to teach and love as was her role in life as a grandmother. Her illness barred her from all of the village activities, and she felt that she was no longer part of the family. Her ghost was not considered to be any more dangerous than that of a person who died a normal death because she was old and her suicide was from old age and weariness. She held no grudge against anyone.

762 159 888 734 [603]

[pp. 214-272 not processed]